

Message Text

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SUBJECT: WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL "THE KREMLIN AND THE
PRESS"

FULL TEXT OF JULY 20 WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL FOLLOWS:

BEGIN TEXT. CONVICTION OF TWO AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS
IN MOSCOW ADDS A NASTY FLOURISH TO THE FAMILIAR SOVIET
EFFORT TO CENSOR THE FOREIGN PRESS BY INTIMIDATION. THE
CORRESPONDENTS HAD REPORTED BEING TOLD THAT THE TELEVISED
CONFESSION OF A DISSIDENT WAS A FAKE. SOVIET AUTHORITIES
CHARGED THAT THE SOVIET TELEVISION HAD THEREBY BEEN LIBELED.
THEIR OBVIOUS PURPOSE IS TO BREAK THE LINK THAT HAS GROWN
UP BETWEEN DISSIDENTS AND CORRESPONDENTS. THE DISSIDENTS
REACH OUT TO THE REPORTERS TO WIN WESTERN SUPPORT AND TO
HAVE WESTERN RADIO STATIONS CARRY THE WORD BACK TO RUSSIA.
THE CORRESPONDENTS REACH FOR THE DISSIDENTS, AND JEWS,
FOR A RICH, LIVE, EMOTIONALLY COMPELLING STORY.

THE TWO CORRESPONDENTS AND THEIR PAPERS, THE BALTIMORE SUN
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PAGE 02 STATE 184340

AND THE NEW YORK TIMES, HAVE BEEN ASSESSED "COURT COSTS"
OF \$1,647 AND ORDERED TO PUBLISH RETRACTIONS. IT IS
POSSIBLE THEY WILL YET BE OUSTED. IF THEY ARE, THAT WILL
RAISE THE QUESTION WHETHER THE U.S. GOVERNMENT, TO KEEP THIS

PARTICULAR ASPECT OF SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS ON AN EVEN
KEEL, OUGHT TO RECIPROCATATE BY KICKING OUT TWO SOVIET

CORRESPONDENTS WORKING IN THIS COUNTRY.

IT IS TIME IN ANY EVENT FOR A MUTUAL PAUSE. DOWN THIS NEWLY TAKEN ROAD LIE HIGH TENSION AND--A SPECIAL MATTER FOR US--THE DECIMATION OF THE TWO COUNTRIES' PRESS CORPS. SOME RUSSIANS NO DOUBT ACHE TO GET RID OF THOSE 20-ODD INQUISITIVE AMERICANS. BUT THEY WOULD THINK TWICE, WE PRESUME, AT LOSING THE SOVIET COUNTERPARTS. MOST AMERICANS, WE BELIEVE, WOULD LIKE BOTH GROUPS TO STAY IN PLACE. THE PROBLEM IS HOW TO RECONCILE SOVIET POLITICAL SENSITIVITY WITH AMERICAN JOURNALISTIC PROFESSIONALISM. WITHOUT CONDONING IT, ONE CAN UNDERSTAND THE KREMLIN'S ANGER AT SEEING THE EXTENSIVE DISSIDENT-CORRESPONDENT CONTACTS, THEMSELVES EVIDENCE OF SUBSTANTIAL LIBERALIZATION, CONSISTENTLY TURNED TO USE AGAINST THE SOVIET STATE. MEANWHILE, AMERICAN JOURNALISTS DEMAND, AS AMERICANS BELIEVE THEY HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO DO, TO BE PERMITTED TO PURSUE THE NEWS AS THEY SEE FIT.

IN FACT, THIS PROBLEM GOES BEYOND THE TREATMENT AND PERFORMANCE OF JOURNALISTS; IT CANNOT BE SOLVED ON THAT LEVEL. AT ITS ROOT IS JIMMY CARTER'S CAMPAIGN TO INTERFERE IN SOVIET INTERNAL AFFAIRS IN THE NAME OF HUMAN RIGHTS. THE SOVIETS CAN HANDLE A CERTAIN LEVEL OF INTERFERENCE, ONE SANCTIONED BY EXPERIENCE AND BY WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT OR THE CODE OF DETENTE. MR. CARTER, UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 STATE 184340

HOWEVER, HAS SURPASSED THAT LEVEL. HE HAS APPARENTLY CONVINCED SOVIET AUTHORITIES THAT HE WANTS TO LOOSEN THE GRIP OF THEIR REGIME. THAT HE DOES NOT ACCEPT THIS READING, OR PERHAPS UNDERSTAND IT, IS BESIDE THE POINT. ONE TEMPTING TARGET FOR THE RUSSIANS, AS THEY STRIKE BACK AT THE CARTER CRUSADE, IS THE AMERICAN PRESS.

WE DO NOT FEEL WE ARE MERELY PLEADING THE SPECIAL CASE OF THE AMERICAN PRESS. FROM THE OUTSET OF THE CARTER PRESIDENCY, WE HAVE FELT THAT HIS HUMAN-RIGHTS DRIVE WAS UNBOTTLING GENIES THAT WOULD WEAKEN THE POLITICAL BASE FOR IMPROVING RELATIONS IN BOTH COUNTRIES. IT IS HAPPENING. THE LATEST INSTANCE IS MR. CARTER'S DECISION TO IMPOSE TIGHTER TRADE CONTROLS IN REPRISAL FOR THE DISSIDENT TRIALS. THAT IS BAD JUDGMENT; A REPRISAL OF THAT SERIOUS ORDER SHOULD BE SAVED FOR SOMETHING TRULY DAMAGING TO AMERICAN INTERESTS, NOT SPENT ON SOMETHING MERELY DISTRESSING TO AMERICAN SENSIBILITIES AND OFFENSIVE TO AMERICAN VALUES.

EVEN UNDER THE RIGHT CIRCUMSTANCES, WE WOULD ARGUE THAT TRADE REPRISALS HAVE ONLY LIMITED UTILITY--IN THE SAME

SENSE THAT TOSSING SOVIET CORRESPONDENTS OUT OF THIS COUNTRY IN RETALIATION FOR SOVIET HARASSMENT OF AMERICAN REPORTERS IS NOT A REAL ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM. IT SENDS A SIGNAL THAT THIS COUNTRY IS SERIOUS ABOUT ITS COMMITMENT TO FREEDOM OF COMMUNICATION. BUT IF THE SOVIETS CHOSE TO PURSUE THEIR CAMPAIGN AGAINST AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS, AND WE CONTINUED AUTOMATICALLY TO RETALIATE, THE RESULT COULD ULTIMATELY BE TO SHUT DOWN COMMUNICATION.

REPRISALS, IN OTHER WORDS, ARE LIKELY TO BE USEFUL ONLY IF THEY ARE COUPLED WITH A CONCERTED EFFORT TO DEAL WITH THE DEVELOPING EVIDENCE THAT THE WHOLE SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP HAS SHAKEN LOOSE. THIS WOULD BE A GOOD TIME, WE THINK, FOR MR. CARTER TO INITIATE AN URGENT AND QUIET UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 04 STATE 184340

DIPLOMATIC EFFORT TO RESTORE SOME SENSE OF COMMON UNDERSTANDING WITH THE SOVIET UNION OF WHAT EXACTLY HE HAD IN MIND IN HIS RECENT ANNAPOLIS SPEECH--WHAT DEGREE OF "COOPERATION" IS POSSIBLE AND WHAT LEVEL OF RESTRAINED COMPETITION IS TOLERABLE, IF THE ALTERNATIVE OF "CONFRONTATION" THAT HE SPOKE OF SO GRIMLY IS TO BE AVOIDED. A LOGICAL AND USEFUL END RESULT MIGHT WELL BE THE OFT-TALKED-ABOUT SUMMIT WITH MR. BREZHNEV, NOT JUST TO MAKE OR SEAL THIS OR THAT SORT OF DEAL, BUT TO REACH A SAFER MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT THE TRAFFIC WILL BEAR BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION.

END TEXT.

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